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Comparison of English and German foreign language

learner strategy use

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INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies have presented a crucial concept in the theory of second language acquisition since the 1960s. They capture a wide range of linguistic behaviours and most often are defined as sets of “conscious thoughts and actions that a learner takes to achieve a learning goal” (Chamot 2004), or as “operations to acquire, retain, retrieve or perform” (Rigney 1978). The concept is connected with self-regulation, metacognition, learning style, and cognitive style. Strategies are most often classified according to psychological functions – cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective (O’Malley, Chamot 1990), or 4 language skills (Cohen, Weaver 2006). In our research, Oxford’s (1990) classification is used. Strategies are divided into direct (memory, cognitive, compensatory) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) ones. Strategy choice and use is influenced by different variables like gender, experience, motivation, or proficiency. Our research question was: Does the use of learner strategies differ according to the acquired foreign language (English or German)?

METHODS

The research is based on Oxford’s strategy classification (1990) and adapted, enlarged inventory SILL (Oxford 1990). Research sample comprised 1482 pupils at the end of primary education, 2384 pupils at the end of lower secondary comprehensive education, and 1038 students at the end of upper secondary comprehensive education.

The strategy inventory for the primary pupils consisted of 28 items with a 3-point frequency scale ($\alpha = 0.74$). The inventory for lower ($\alpha = 0.90$) and upper ($\alpha = 0.80$) secondary students used a 5-point scale for 67 items. Students were asked to report their strategy use in a preferred foreign language which was mostly English.

RESULTS

Differences in overall strategy use were found only among pupils at primary level. Pupils learning English reported to use strategies more than pupils learning German. Nevertheless, lower secondary pupils learning German reported using memory, affective, and social strategies more than pupils learning English. Relations were significant but extremely weak ($R > 0.05$). The upper secondary students preferring English tended to use more cognitive strategies, and students who preferred German used more memory and affective strategies. Students at all levels also differed in the use of some single strategies. The influence of English as the first foreign language on strategy use in German as the second foreign language will also be analysed.

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Foreign Language Learning Strategies and Achievement: Analysis of Strategy Clusters and Sequences.

Anotace česky:

Příspěvek zjišťoval rozdíly v používání strategií učení se žáky v němčině a angličtině.

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Anotation (zkrácený abstrakt):

Learning strategies capture a wide range of linguistic behaviours and most often are defined as sets of “conscious thoughts and actions that a learner takes to achieve a learning goal” (Chamot 2004), or as “operations to acquire, retain, retrieve or perform” (Rigney 1978). Strategies are most often classified according to psychological functions. In our research, Oxford’s (1990) classification is used. Strategies are divided into direct (memory, cognitive, compensatory) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) ones. Our research question was: Does the use of learner strategies differ according to the acquired foreign language (English or German)? The research is based on adapted, enlarged inventory SILL (Oxford 1990). Research sample comprised 1482 pupils at the end of primary education, 2384 pupils at the end of lower secondary comprehensive education, and 1038 students at the end of upper secondary comprehensive education. The inventory for the primary pupils consisted of 28 items with a 3-point frequency scale ($\alpha = 0.74$); for lower ($\alpha = 0.90$) and upper ($\alpha = 0.80$) secondary students of 67 items with a 5-point scale. Students were asked to report their strategy use in a preferred foreign language which was mostly English. Differences in overall strategy use were found only among pupils at primary level. Pupils learning English reported to use strategies more than pupils learning German. Nevertheless, lower secondary pupils learning German reported using memory, affective, and social strategies more than pupils learning English. Relations were significant but extremely weak ($R > 0.05$). The upper secondary students preferring English tended to use more cognitive strategies, and students who preferred German used more memory and affective strategies. Students at all levels also differed in the use of some single strategies.